

## Unsung Hero ... Lance Cpl. Cody Perkins

*Kristen Price, a senior at Meridian High School, nominated this Purple Heart recipient, Lance Cpl. Cody Perkins of the U.S. Marine Corps, as an Unsung Hero. She met Cody when he worked as a recruiter in Meridian; he has since returned to Camp Pendleton.*

**By Kristen Price**  
special to The Star

If you asked most 20-year-olds about their daily lives, they might tell you they attend school and church and hang out with their friends. Occasionally you would stories of jobs, whether they be pleasant or not.

This generic response is what we often consider "normal." For Cody Perkins, however, daily life isn't so normal.

Cody Perkins is a 20-year-old graduate of West Lauderdale High School. He is a son, a brother and an uncle. He is also a proud U.S. Marine and one of my very dear friends. Before knowing Cody, I was unaware of what it's like to actually love and care about someone so involved in the military.

Upon graduating high school, Cody began his career as a Marine. He attended basic training and Infantry School and then he was off to San Diego, where he was stationed at Camp Pendleton.

After three months of hard training, Cody received word that he was being sent to Iraq. It was a pivotal piece of news, especially for Cody, but also for his loved ones back at home.

Aug. 8 was an unforgettable day for him. It was 8 a.m. on a seemingly normal



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### ROADSIDE BOMB

Lance Cpl. Cody Perkins of the U.S. Marine Corps was nearly killed in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded, destroying the Humvee in which he was riding. Three large pieces of metal from the bomb were deeply embedded in Cody's body; one caused a rib to puncture his spleen.

day in Iraq. Riding down a highway, Cody and his comrades encountered a roadside bomb that exploded, destroying the Humvee.

Fortunately nobody was killed, but one person was severely wounded. That one person was Cody. Three large pieces of metal from the bomb were deeply embedded in Cody's body; one caused a rib to puncture his spleen. He underwent several surgeries and eventually recovered.

Cody was awarded a Purple Heart. If asked, Cody would jokingly say that the

best part of receiving a Purple Heart is having free license plates for the rest of his life. However, he knows that it is really an honor and a reminder of how lucky he is to be alive today.

Cody is doing well. His life is now what we know as normal, although he has returned to Camp Pendleton. I admire Cody for his bravery, courage, and pride as a U.S. Marine. I believe that although he is a normal 20-year-old in some aspects, he is also a hero in all of our hearts.

## A SPECIAL MESSAGE ...

*The Meridian Star's Unsung Heroes are always shy. They don't like the limelight and they're puzzled about why they have been singled out by their friends, families and neighbors. This year's Unsung Heroes are particularly eager for you to know that they don't think they're anything special. As private individuals, they feel they are their brothers' keepers. The ones who are members of the military feel that anybody in their unit would be every bit as deserving. They made us promise to tell you that.*

## Unsung Heroes ...

# Master Chief Alan Johnson and Master Sgt. Ronald Adkins

*Wherever you look in Lauderdale County, you see personnel from Naval Air Station Meridian quietly volunteering, helping out, making a difference. These two Unsung Heroes were nominated by Pat Barber, Area 5 Special Olympics director, who says Alan Johnson and Ronald Adkins are his "go-to guys."*

**By Pat Barber**  
special to The Star

The NAS Meridian Navy-Marine Corps team could definitely be counted among the area's Unsung Heroes, especially when it comes to the Area 5 Special Olympics.

Team leaders Master Chief Alan Johnson and Master Sgt. Ronald Adkins are the people I go to when I need help running an event. Why? Because they are always ready to help.

Each year, Area 5 Special Olympics has two major events, and several small events, during which 600 athletes are assisted and cheered on by hundreds of sailors and Marines from NAS Meridian.

In the spring, Marines and sailors invade Ray Stadium to help with the huge track and field competition. In the fall, hundreds of athletes invade NAS Meridian for the Fall Games, which include equestrian events, senior bowling, golf, softball skills and soccer skills.

How do you manage to get a good event involving hundreds of athletes and hundreds of volunteers? Teamwork!

Special Olympics and NAS Meridian make a good team. We're very fortunate to have the Navy and Marine Corps per-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Naval Air Station Meridian's Command Master Chief Alan Johnson, left, and Marine Schools Staff-Noncommissioned Officer in Charge Master Sgt. Ronald Adkins look over a Special Olympics planning schedule.

sonnel, as well as the base, to help us carry out our mission. I just can't say enough good things about Master Chief and Master Sergeant.

Unsung Heroes, yes, but Master Chief

Johnson, Master Sergeant Adkins and the other Navy and Marine Corps volunteers don't give of themselves for recognition, they give of themselves for humanity.

## Unsung Hero ...

# Sgt. Scott Rawson

*Four members of Sgt. Scott Rawson's family submitted "Unsung Hero" nominations about his courage and sacrifice — his wife, Ami; his mother and father, Beverly Davis and Donald Rawson; and his sister, Melissa.*

*Scott is a member of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion. Here's what his family said about him.*

"My husband, Sgt. Scott Rawson, is a strong person who didn't think twice about going to Iraq with his unit. He is making this a positive experience about helping other people. Even though it is very hard to be away from his family, I admire him for the bravery and strength that he has for not only himself, but also for his family. Me and our kids are very proud of him. He is our hero. Let's all pray for the safe homecoming for all our troops."

**Ami Rawson**

"Even though Scott is very much a family and home person, he also has a sense of duty to his country and fellow Guardsmen. He told me that, as much as he did not want to go to Iraq, he would not stay home if given the opportunity. Scott's sense of duty and his sense of humor will help him, and his fellow Guardsmen, make it through this tough time. I am very proud of him."

**Beverly Davis**

"Sgt. Donald Scott Rawson is known for his outgoing personality. He's a 'people person' who makes it a point to meet and know everyone. He has always been a civil servant — as a Meridian police officer and firefighter, a Lauderdale County deputy and a federal firefighter at Naval Air Station Meridian.

"He's everybody's friend and the guy everybody likes to call friend. A tough outer crust with a heart big as gold, I'm sure the ones with him will never have a dull moment as he entertains the troops with his stories which may or may not be true — but are certainly entertaining."

**Donald Rawson**

"You have spent years serving others through police and fire occupations and now you are serving your country. We are very proud of you. Your dedication to your job makes Americans like us able to live freely. We will continue to pray daily for you and others serving in the armed forces. Thanks for being a great brother and soldier."

**Melissa Goldman**

## Unsung Hero ...

# Thelma McConnell

*Rachel Woodfin nominated Thelma McConnell, for this Unsung Hero award. Of her friend and neighbor, Rachel says: "Her motto is to put Christ first, others second and herself last."*

**By Rachel Woodfin**  
special to The Star

Thelma McConnell has spent almost her entire lifetime caring for others.

At an early age, she lost her mother and had to learn to care for her siblings — and also cousins who came to live with the family.

She married Clifton McConnell in 1936 and later brought their nephew, Tommy Briggs, into their home and raised him as their own. They celebrated 60 years of marriage in December 1996, before he passed away in March 1997.

She began her teaching career in December 1951 and continued to teach until 1982. She spent the last 28 of her 31 years as a teacher at the Margie B. Aust Elementary School in Scooba.

She is a member of the Retired Teachers Association, Homemaker's Club, Historical Society and the Fellowship Circle. She is a member of the Scooba Sunday Methodist Church, taught Sunday school for several years and is chairman of the board.

Even with all this, she still finds time to



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### A LOT OF LIVING

Thelma McConnell shows bound diaries about her daily life she started back in 1977. Nearly 87 years old, Thelma says she's done a lot of living in her life and Rachel Woodfin, who nominated her as an Unsung Hero, says she has spent much of it serving others.

visit the nursing home weekly and you can find her cooking for her neighbors and friends. If there is a need in the community, she is the first to ask, "What can I do to help?" Her motto is to put Christ first, others second and herself last.

She is a fine example of a hero and should

be honored as such. Her love for Christ and her fellow man shows each and every day. She has an incredible amount of strength and energy for all her family and friends. God has richly blessed her and He has blessed all of us who have the privilege of being her family and friends.

## Unsung Heroes ...

# John Simmons and Dr. Tom Lawrence

*Tanya Thompson is the the coordinator of continuing education at Meridian Community College. She nominated Dr. Tom Lawrence and John Simmons as Unsung Heroes for their "passion, patriotism and perseverance."*

**By Tanya Thompson**  
special to The Star

A series of history lectures at Meridian Community College has shown me firsthand the passion two gentlemen have for their country — and the passion they have for the importance of American history in our community and schools.

John F. Kennedy once said, "There is little that is more important for an American citizen to know than the history and traditions of his country."

Dr. Tom Lawrence and Mr. John Simmons created the series, called "American History and Our Heritage," and they're working to keep patriotism alive and well in Meridian.

Both have served their country in the military. They are veterans. Dr. Lawrence served during World War II. Mr. Simmons served in the Mississippi Air National Guard and later in the U.S. Army. They are both successful businessmen and good citizens. They both care about our country. They both care about our community.

Dr. Tom Lawrence is a member of the Patrick Boggan Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, and the chairman of its History Committee ...

## Unsung Hero ...

# Ron Carlberg

*Molenda Martin, director of materials management at Riley Hospital, nominated as an Unsung Hero the man who never lets anything slip between the cracks — storeroom supervisor Ron Carlberg. She also says that Ron has always been there for her and her family in the tough times.*

**By Molenda Martin**  
special to The Star

Ron Carlberg has worked for Riley Hospital for 6½ years. When I came to Meridian in the winter of 2001, Ron and I immediately became friends. He took me under his wing and showed me around Meridian. He came to know my family and treated them like they were his own.

In March 2004, my oldest daughter was diagnosed with cancer. Through this trying time, Ron kept my thoughts positive and my spirits high. He always gave words of encouragement.

Not only did he support us mentally, he supported us financially.

He organized and donated supplies for a fund-raiser to help pay her medical expenses. He, along with other volunteers, helped raise \$3,500. This meant a great deal to my daughter and me and I will be forever grateful.

Ron is a believer in the community and supports local organizations such as the Wesley House, American Cancer Society, March of Dimes and United Way. He contributes, but requires no recognition.

Not only is Ron a great friend, he is also one of the best employees Riley Hospital could have. He is dedicated to the hospital



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### APPRECIATING OUR HERITAGE

John Simmons, left, and Dr. Tom Lawrence organized an ongoing lecture series called "American History and Our Heritage." Both are veterans who believe it's important to understand our history and heritage.

They present programs to classes or assemblies at schools and to service clubs, social clubs and church groups. It is hoped that these vignettes — presented by new faces with new approaches — will make students more interested in history ...

Mr. Simmons is a member of the Veterans for Accurate History. This is a non-profit organization of Veterans of the armed forces of the United States of America. They are dedicated to fostering a clearer, deeper, more meaningful understanding of American history — with the goal of producing better citizens and inspiring patriotism.

This organization educates citizens about the real-life experiences, courage and sacrifices of our veterans, promotes respect and

patriotism, and increases understanding of historical events.

Members speak to public organizations, social groups and to classes and assemblies in schools about our form of government, how it was created, and how this nation has developed and endured as a beacon of freedom, liberty, equality, justice, individual rights and compassion.

I applaud these gentlemen for their tenacity. They are committed to their cause. They have a passion and are making a difference. Maybe it's time we all tried to make a difference.

As a wise man once said, "All it takes for us to lose our heritage and history is for good men and women to do nothing."



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### ALWAYS THERE

Ron Carlberg is the storeroom supervisor at Riley Hospital. "Not only is Ron a great friend, he is also one of the best employees Riley Hospital could have," Molenda Martin said. "He is dedicated to the hospital and always meets and greets with a smile."

and always meets and greets with a smile.

Although Ron does not have direct patient contact, he makes the patients' needs his No. 1 concern by making sure that the hospital has adequate supplies. He often works after hours and on holidays so that the other

employees in our department can have time off ...

I would like to say congratulations to Ron for all the hard work and thank him for being there for me and making me feel at home. You will always hold a place in my heart.

## Unsung Hero ... Technical Sgt. James Reid

*Jennifer Reid submitted this Unsung Hero nomination about her husband, Technical Sgt. James Reid of the 186th Air Refueling Wing. Jennifer said he was wounded when the Mississippi Air National Guard called him up in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, but he never let it show.*

**By Jennifer Reid**  
special to The Star

I remember Sept. 11, 2001, just like it was yesterday. I was at work in the laboratory at Jeff Anderson Regional Medical Center, pregnant with my third child (due date Sept. 25) and realizing this terrorist act was going to affect our lives in so many ways.

The fear of not knowing if my husband, Technical Sgt. James Reid of the 186th Air Refueling Wing, would be here for the birth of our child — especially since we lost our first child at three months of age and the miscarriage of a second baby.

Not knowing how long he would be gone, and possibly not coming home any time soon to enjoy the first year of his child's life, filled me with fear and anxiety. I feared the danger he would be in and the idea that he might never come home.

I'm sure my husband had the same fears but I could never see it on his face. He was going to do whatever it took to make sure his child would have the freedom she deserves.



PHOTO BY PAULA MERRITT / THE MERIDIAN STAR

### STATESIDE NOW

Technical Sgt. James Reid stands in front of a KC-135R Stratotanker, the aircraft used to refuel jets in mid-air, at Key Field in Meridian. He is a crew chief responsible for the "launch and recovery" of the plane — which means they get it ready for takeoff and receive it after it lands.

Reagan was born Sept. 13, 2001, and James wasn't deployed until she was three months old. Throughout her first year, he was deployed several times and it seemed to be harder every time he had to leave — but my husband knew what he had to do for his family.

I would like to say "thank you," James,

for the sacrifice he has made to make sure our child has freedom. You are a true hero to me and Reagan.

To all the men and women who serve in our military, especially those who have children and are missing them grow up, you are our true heroes. Because of you, we have smiles on our faces and pride in our hearts.